Los Angeles DEC 27 1967

Lindsay's Bay of Pigs

BY MAX LERNER

[redacted]

Every young political idealist, bursting into high public office, is bound to carry on his education in public. President Kennedy had his Bay of Pigs. Mayor John Lindsay of New York now has his James Marcus disaster.

In meeting disaster publicly, every man also shows his basic political style and character. I liked Mr. Kennedy's better, because publicly he refused to shunt the blame onto others but took it on himself, even though privately he raged against the CIA. Lindsay gave a lame explanation that explained nothing, and put the blame on Marcus for betraying him instead of on himself for being innocent and gullible.

*

Understandably the press and TV are enjoying the spectacle. Given all-too-human envies and frustrations, nothing is as delicious to most people as a good, rousing scandal, and nothing is as scandalous as the image of puffed-up self-righteous virtue taking a pratfall.

In this case there are two pratfalls, thus providing virtue-watchers with a delectable bonus. One is that of Marcus, who came out of nowhere to become a high member of Lindsay's cabinet and a close and trusted friend of the mayor. His arrest and his indictment by a grand jury for allegedly taking a $16,000 kickback on an $800,000 contract form part of a classical pattern of corruption strangely out of place in an administration so pure in heart.

Hence the second pratfall, that of Lindsay himself, as the Galahad of a new city politics which finds itself strangely soiled by an old politics as old and weary as the expulsion from Eden.

Lindsay's own virtue and good will are unquestioned. But no man who has made so many promises and has become so fervent a crusading symbol has the right to be as naive as Lindsay has proved himself to be. The more he protests how badly Marcus lied to him and betrayed him, the more claim he establishes for joining George Romney in the unenviable company of of the brainwashed.

Thus the new morality play in New York, in an off-Broadway theater called City Hall, with a strangely assorted cast headed by Marcus as the presumed culprit and Lindsay as the obvious dupe. The mystery of what made Marcus tick is all the more puzzling because, while he emerges as an operator, he was an operator of the quiet rather than the flamboyant type.

He had held shadowy corporate jobs which now turn out to have been not much more than a salesman's, and has been involved in a stock venture which no one today can find on the securities map. He had married the daughter of a Connecticut governor, a fact that evidently canceled out all the shadows in his past and gave him a stance in the present.

*

He moved into Lindsay's entourage by showing up as a volunteer unpaid campaign worker, an always persuasive path to power in an era when campaigns are expensive and able volunteers scarce. But the Golden Boy, who couldn't live on glamor alone, seems to have gotten deeper into money troubles, and perhaps found the Mafia there to bail him out—at a price.

Lindsay's failure, it has been pointed out, was that he didn't insist that the contract Marcus awarded be made competitive, and even more that he didn't have a check made on Marcus himself. But both these failures are an emblem of a more far-reaching weakness. It was the feeling of a young reforming mayor that a city can be run as a personal operation, on the basis of personal friendships and loyalties that can be validated or betrayed.

With all of Lindsay's jaunty energy and good will, it is a style that won't wash. For it is a two-dimensional approach to reality, that sees only the surface of reality. The third dimension—the depth and density of a man's character as revealed by his whole life-history—is somehow lost in the process.